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Patty Berg



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Dear Friends,

I want to thank all of you who responded so warmly to last month's newsletter. It's very satisfying to know how much support there is for the work I'm doing here in Sacramento.

My bills are moving forward. The California Compassionate Choices Act, modeled on Oregon's Death With Dignity Act, has cleared its first hurdle in the Assembly, and now is awaiting a vote of another important panel before it goes to the full body for a vote.

My needle-exchange bill is ready to go before the full Assembly, and may already have done so by the time you read this. This measure would make it easier for cities and counties to operate clean-needle programs that fight AIDS and Hepatitis-C.

The Safe Rides to School Act, which would help rural school districts replace their pre-1987 buses, was approved in the Assembly Education Committee and now awaits a hearing in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

My bill that would extend the caregiver's tax credit, set to expire this year, is currently in the Assembly Revenue and Taxation Committee. The bill would help people who take care of ailing family members.

There's plenty of work ahead. Making law is not supposed to be easy. It's hard for a reason. And I assure you, I'm up for the task.

As always, thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patty Berg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Assemblywoman, 1st District

Gathering New Partners for Aid-in-Dying Bill

From the very start, it's been clear that it's going to take a lot of support from a lot of people if we are going to give dying patients the ability to take control of their own deaths.

That's why the California Compassionate Choices Act (Assembly Bill 654) is being jointly authored by myself and my good friend Assemblyman Lloyd Levine.

And that's why I'm very happy to say that we've begun adding co-authors to the bill.

So far, nine colleagues have signed on to this important bill. That's eight other Assembly members and a senator who share the belief that people have a right to make personal and private choices about their own lives.

Let me say right here how grateful I am

for the support of these people, whose opinions I respect and whose support I value.

In addition to the support of policymakers here in Sacramento, the bill also has attracted the backing of the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Organization for Women, the Older Women's League, and others.

As I told the Assembly Judiciary Committee earlier this month, this bill isn't about the particular decision any one of us might make if facing a terminal illness. And this bill isn't about what we might think of each other's choices.

This bill is about the simple and good concept that we each respect each other's privacy and that we respect our fellow adults enough to let them make their own decisions.

Crime experts say that only one out of five incidents of financial abuse against elders is reported to authorities.

Working to Protect Elders from Financial Abuse

There are very few things more offensive to our sense of right and wrong than the idea of someone deliberately exploiting the most vulnerable members of our society.

And yet, some 200,000 Californians are victims of elder and dependent adult abuse each year.

Financial abuse in particular is rapidly becoming one of the most prevalent problems facing California's growing elder population.

Although people of all ages can be victims of financial abuse, the elderly are the most frequent targets.

Many lose their life savings as a result of falling victim to such abuse.

Early detection for financial abuse is critical.

Financial institutions have the potential to be the first line of defense against such abuse. In fact, no institution is in a better position to observe and report suspicious behavior.

We already require health care workers, clergy members, and a long list of others to report known or suspected

abuse to the appropriate authorities. It's time that the list be expanded to include employees of financial institutions.

This year, I'm co-authoring legislation, AB 1605 and SB 1018 to do just that.

The banking industry is opposing our efforts, citing concerns about liability for failure to report, yet the risk of liability is very small. They'd like to keep their employees as voluntary reporters for financial abuse.

We already have voluntary reporting, if it was working, financial abuse wouldn't be a growing problem.

The primary purpose of mandatory reporting laws is to encourage reporting, rather than punish potential reporters for failure to report.

Currently, the penalty for any mandated reporter, whether they are a janitor or a surgeon, is a misdemeanor.

In California, it's a misdemeanor to have a library book overdue by 30 days. In some areas, it's a misdemeanor to not trim your hedges to a certain height.

It's time for us to combat financial abuse where it occurs.

Things Get Better When Every Day is Earth Day

Someone told me recently that “real environmentalists don’t do Earth Day.”

“For us,” she said, “every day is Earth Day.”

I love the sound of that. Every day should be Earth Day. Paying attention to our planet once a year is obviously not enough. We can and must do more.

But not everyone is a real environmentalist. And to the extent that Earth Day can give someone a chance to adopt a new vision, to change an old habit or to refocus a belief, I say Earth Day, now in its 35th year, is a good thing.

The first Earth Day prompted the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency and laws such as the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act.

We still have a long way to go to create the kind of healthy, sustainable community that many of us believe is

attainable.

And yet, it’s worth looking back to 1969, when former U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson first dreamed of Earth Day. The truth is, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the oceans, rivers, and streams that surround us are cleaner than they were back then, and certainly much cleaner than they would be had action not begun.

Nelson proposed Earth Day as the first large-scale environmental protest “...to shake up the political establishment and force this issue onto the national agenda.”

Now on this anniversary of that beginning, I for one offer my sincere gratitude to all of you who live every day in a way that respects the wonder of our planet. Thanks to all of you for whom every day is, indeed, Earth Day.

A truly precious resource: only about 1 percent of the Earth’s water is fresh, clean and accessible for human use.

Honoring the Passing of a True Peacemaker

You’ve probably heard about the death of Marla Ruzicka, the 28-year-old peace advocate who was killed by a car-bomb blast as she worked to help war victims in Baghdad.

Ms. Ruzicka was a resident of the city of Lakeport – a neighbor, really, to all of us here in the First Assembly District.

As word of her passing spread around the country, both houses of the state Legislature convened on her behalf.

It was an honor to take a moment to respect a young life out of which so much good work had flowed.

She was born in Ukiah and raised in Lakeport. She was a student government leader at Terrace Elementary School and Clear Lake High School.

After graduating high school in 1995, she attended Long Island University in New York, where she was drawn to the Global Education Friends World Program, and flexible curriculum that allowed her to travel.

She spent eight years working for Global Exchange, and she founded an organization to assist civilian war victims

in Afghanistan and Iraq.

She lead teams of door-to-door surveyors who tallied casualties, and she lobbied Congress and private donors for money to help survivors.

She convinced Congress to set aside \$2.5 million for efforts in Afghanistan and \$10 million for Iraq.

She has been called a “one-person aid association.”

U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy, who helped her win federal aid for war victims, remarked about the power of her personality.

She is survived by her parents, Cliff and Nancy Ruzicka, her twin brother Mark Ruzicka, her stepbrothers James Ruzicka and John Ruzicka, and her stepsisters Jill Leighton and Joy Ruzicka.

From all accounts, Marla Ruzicka’s life is a testament to selflessness and giving.

National leaders, including United States senators, and representatives have paid honor to her memory. State leaders, including Sen. Wesley Chesbro, Assemblyman Mark Leno and myself have likewise made tribute.

Oregon Governor Joins Patty Berg at State Capitol



70% of Californians say that incurably ill patients should have the right to ask for and receive life-ending medication

Former Oregon Gov. Barbara Roberts, left, joins Patty Berg in the state Capitol earlier this month. Roberts, who was in office when Oregon voters first approved the Death With Dignity Act, came to Sacramento to testify in support of Patty Berg's efforts to pass the California Compassionate Choices Act, based on the Oregon law. Photo courtesy of Compassion&Choices.

Coffee Break

Democracy Dazzler

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C T E T R I G H T S R P Q R N
W F I L E G I S L A T I V E I
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AMENDMENT
BICAMERAL
CONGRESS
CONSTITUTION
EXECUTIVE
FREEDOM
INDEPENDENCE
JUDICIAL
LEGISLATIVE
REPRESENTATIVE
RIGHTS
SENATE
VOTE

Words can be written diagonally, bottom to top or backwards.